

AF civil engineers repair runway



Air Force Staff Sgt. Stephen Deen, a pavements and equipment operator with the 455th Expeditionary Operations Group civil engineer element, smooths concrete on the active runway as a \$2.3 million airfield fix got underway in mid-April. Deen is normally assigned to the 30th Civil Engineer Squadron at Vandenberg Air Force Base, Calif. The airfield repair project is scheduled to continue until October.

Story and photos by
Tech. Sgt. Adam Johnston
455th Expeditionary Operations Group

BAGRAM, Afghanistan – Tech. Sgt. John Foster sits on an active runway here in a truck and simply covers his ears as a C-130 Hercules races by just yards away and takes off into the blue.

Foster isn't lost.

He even laughs at the thought of being photographed like this. But as the cargo plane heads over Afghanistan's Hindu Kush mountain range, Foster, runway repair project manager with the 455th Expeditionary Operations Group at Bagram Air Base, climbs out of his truck, calls the control tower and rounds up his "sidelined" work crew to start pouring concrete again.

This "game on, game off" scene for Foster — deployed here from the 18th Civil Engi-

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Troops could leave Afghanistan in 2004

By Chris Kraul
Los Angeles Times staff writer

BAGRAM, Afghanistan — The departing commander of U.S.-led military forces in Afghanistan says those troops' success fighting terrorist holdouts, combined with improved recruiting by the new Afghan army, means that Americans stationed here could start going home as early as summer 2004.

During an interview in which he reviewed his year in command, Lt. Gen. Dan McNeill gave no timeline for a U.S. withdrawal. And Afghan ground troops may need U.S. air support indefinitely, since there is no plan at present for the American military to train Afghan helicopter or jet aircraft pilots, he said.

But he credited a shift in allied military tactics last summer to battalion-size conventional operations for cleaning out large numbers of terrorist holdouts, uncovering several huge caches of weapons and crippling enemy forces' ability to mount a meaningful offensive.

"From a military point of view, we have done a superb job," McNeill said. "There's still some enemy out there, just a whole lot less of them.

A lot of people expected the enemy to mount a spring offensive this year, and the fact is that the [military force] mounting it was us."

The general said Friday that 9,000 Afghan soldiers should be trained and on duty by the summer of next year, which would permit a gradual reduction of allied forces. The latter currently number 11,500, of whom 8,500 are U.S. soldiers, Marines and airmen.

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld told reporters during a visit to the Afghan capital, Kabul, on Thursday that the combat phase of military operations in Afghanistan was largely over and that forces had begun "shifting their weight" to concentrate more on civil assistance and reconstruction projects.

But remnants of the deposed Taliban regime and al-Qaida terrorist network continue to harass U.S. bases and patrols — especially near the Pakistani border, where many have taken refuge — killing and wounding U.S. and Afghan troops.

As he has in other interviews, McNeill criticized Pakistan for not doing more to police its border and control the movements of terrorist

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World News (Compiled from CNN.com)



Scott Peterson, right, and his attorneys listen to the judge in Monday's hearing.

Peterson judge won't recuse self

MODESTO, Calif. — The judge in the murder trial of Scott Peterson declined Monday to recuse himself as defense attorneys had sought.

Peterson is accused of killing his pregnant wife, Laci, and their unborn son.

The defense had said Stanislaus County Superior Court Judge Al Girolami should disqualify himself from hearing the criminal case because he had been involved in a related civil case, but Girolami denied the defense motion after a hearing.

That related case stemmed from a local newspaper seeking access to search warrants that had been sealed prior to Peterson's arrest and that remain sealed under court order. Authorities originally wanted the search warrants sealed so that any suspects in the case would not be tipped off.

The issue of unsealing those search warrants came before a separate judge in a second hearing Monday, but he declined to issue a ruling, saying it was out of his jurisdiction.

Later, California's Fifth District Court of Appeals ruled that the search warrants and affidavits in the case would remain sealed.

Peterson, wearing a dark blue suit, was in the courtroom with his lead attorney, Mark Geragos, for the recusal hearing before Girolami. Peterson did not attend the second hearing.

Peterson is being held in the Stanislaus County Jail, awaiting trial on two counts of murder for the deaths of his wife and his son, who was due to be born in February.

Peterson said his wife disappeared from their Modesto home Christmas Eve after he

left early that morning to go fishing.

The bodies of his wife and baby washed up in early April near the Berkeley Marina, where Peterson said he had launched his boat on that fishing trip.

Peterson was arrested a few days after the bodies were discovered.

The 30-year-old Peterson has pleaded not guilty. Prosecutors have said they would seek the death penalty against Peterson if he were convicted.

A hearing originally scheduled Tuesday to consider bail for Peterson was canceled last week at Geragos' request.

Girolami has scheduled another pretrial hearing for May 27.

Death, damage reported in twisters' wake

JACKSON, Tenn. — The death toll climbed Monday as rescuers combed through twisted wreckage and crumbled buildings after an "extremely rare" outbreak of tornadoes Sunday and early Monday killed at least 39 people in Missouri, Kansas and Tennessee.

Thousands of residents from Kansas to Tennessee were without power late Monday. Many of them faced the formidable task of rebuilding homes wiped out in the storms.

President Bush offered his condolences to the tornado victims at a stopover in Little Rock, Arkansas, a state that also suffered tornado damage over the weekend.

"The federal government will move as quickly as we possibly can where help is needed," Bush said. "Nature is awfully tough at times. And the best we can do is to pray for those who suffered."

Severe weather continued to pound parts of the nation through Monday, with tornado warnings in Michigan, Tennessee, Alabama and Mississippi in effect in the evening.

The National Weather Service issued a tornado watch for northern Georgia, including the metro Atlanta area, until 3:30 a.m.

A storm at the Georgia-Alabama border prompted a tornado warning for the Anniston, Alabama, area.

Two twisters were reported in northeastern Mississippi shortly before 8 p.m. Mon-

day [9 p.m. EDT]. The National Weather Service radar indicated a tornado three miles west of Paynes, Mississippi, moving eastward. Radar also indicated another twister 13 miles west of Velma moving northeast.



Authorities say Pfc. Jessica Lynch does not remember details of the attack in which she was taken prisoner.

Ex-POW can't remember ambush

WASHINGTON — Rescued prisoner of war Jessica Lynch is suffering from a form of memory loss that prevents her from recalling details from the time she was ambushed in Iraq to a point during her captivity there, authorities said Monday.

Lynch suffered a head laceration and spinal injury, and both her legs and her right arm and foot were broken during her ordeal in Iraq. Lynch, who recently turned 20, has been recuperating at Walter Reed Army Medical Center.

One Pentagon source said Lynch has told her debriefers that she doesn't remember the ambush and that she finally came to in the Iraqi hospital where she was rescued. Investigators have been hoping the Army private first class could provide a firsthand account of what happened. Hospital spokeswoman Kiki Bryant said doctors "are not concerned about amnesia, her mental and physical state. "They are pleased with her progress," Bryant said. "As with all casualties, Walter Reed Army Medical Center provides the e physical, emotional and spiritual care to all patients."

English for tae kwon do, a fair trade



Photo courtesy of the Bagram Air Base Korean PAO

A Korean black belt instructor begins an early morning tae kwon do class with some stretching exercises. In exchange for tae kwon do training the Koreans receive English classes from the U.S. forces. According to the Koreans, "It's a working relationship."

By Pfc. Christina Carde
11th Public Affairs Detachment

BAGRAM, Afghanistan – In a joint task force environment, American soldiers have the benefit of working side by side with armed forces from other countries. This benefit becomes even more rewarding when each force can bring a different learning experience “to the table.”

The Korean and American forces here have found a way to not only work together but to benefit from each other's knowledge. As the Korean soldiers work on the Americans' endurance and physical fitness through tae kwon do training, the U.S. soldiers stimulate their Korean instructors' minds with the fundamentals of the English language.

“We hold tae kwon do classes on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays from 6 to 7 a.m. at the old Viper City dining facility for American and all other forces who want to learn,” said 1st Lt. JaeNeung Lee, platoon leader, Infantry

platoon, Korean Marine Corps. “In return, our American students hold English classes for us here (the Korean clinic) and at our Engineer compound throughout the week. It's a working relationship.”

“At first the Korean soldiers were shy and a little apprehensive, but now they are very open and willing to learn English,” said Capt. Monica Sneed, English class instructor, Detachment A, 126th Finance Battalion, Fort Bragg, N.C. “We have beginner, intermediate and advanced classes with about 10 students from the clinic and 24 students from the engineer's compound in each class. It's a good turnout and they always do their homework.”

Even though difficulties as well as rewards come with both the tae kwon do and English classes, the Korean instructors think their American counterparts get the better end of the deal.

“When we began the classes in March, we issued all of our American students free karate uniforms which usually cost about \$30 each,” said Lee. “We also have about 10 instructors for our

beginner and advanced classes four of which are 4th degree black belts.”

In addition to the new uniforms and skilled instructors, the American students have the easier of the two learning experiences, according to Lee.

“In tae kwon do, it takes about three years of constant training to earn a black belt,” said Lee. “Many of us have been studying English for over ten years and still can't get the hang of it. However, it's still important for us to learn so we can communicate with the U.S. forces better both here and in our own country.”

Tae kwon do and English may offer challenges on different levels, but there are also similarities.

“Whether it's an English word or a karate move, you must practice each over and over again until you become proficient,” said Lee. “I believe the Korean and American soldiers alike are both eager to learn from each other and they are very determined.”

Along with learning a new skill, the American and Korean soldiers are learning something new about each other's culture.

“Learning English and tae kwon do are important each in their own way, but we have learned a lot more than that from each other,” said Lee. “Along with the discipline and patience our students learn in tae kwon do class, they also now have a deeper respect and insight into our culture. In the same way, the more English we learn and the more we interact with the U.S. forces, the better outlook we have on the world.”

The Korean tae kwon do instructors now hope to take their skill to new levels.

“We want coalition forces from all over Bagram to attend our tae kwon do classes,” said Lee. “We are very happy for the attendance and determination our students show. We want other countries to have a chance to learn something from our culture, and we'll in turn learn what we can from them.”



Tech. Sgt. John Foster (right), runway repair project manager with the 455th Expeditionary Operations Group civil engineer element, looks inside a concrete mixer as Tech. Sgt. James Holman spreads concrete in a hole on the active runway. Foster is normally assigned to the 18th Civil Engineer Squadron at Kadena Air Base, Japan, and Holman is normally assigned to the 48th Civil Engineer Squadron at Royal Air Force Lakenheath, United Kingdom.



Holman spreads concrete on the active runway.

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neer Squadron at Kadena Air Base in Japan — and other civil engineers here will continue for the next six months as part of a \$2.3 million airfield fix that is literally being done between take offs and landings.

“It’s an adrenaline rush every time an aircraft passes us,” says Capt. Chris Fuller, officer in charge of the 455th EOG’s civil engineer element. Fuller is normally assigned to the 18th CES in Okinawa. “We are routinely 90 feet from A-10s taking off and landing on the active taxiway at normal speeds,” he said. “No where else in the world would you operate heavy equipment next to aircraft traveling at 130 knots or whatever they land at.”

Operating heavy equipment while aircraft pass just feet away isn’t the only hazard construction crews face here as they replace a 2,000-foot section of the 9,800-foot runway. “There are massive quantities of UXOs, abandoned munitions and mine fields right next to where my crews are working,” said Fuller.

In mid-April, Foster’s work crew slowed their work to hear the nervous chatter of emergency workers as they called for help over the radio when a soldier stepped on a land mine near the opposite end of the runway and lost part of his leg. Because of such

hazards, stepping off — even the active runway — to let aircraft pass isn’t an option workers here actively pursue. “We’re very reluctant to leave the tarmac because explosive ordnance disposal team keep finding mines and UXOs in the infields near the runway.”

But while the dangers in this war zone are clear, Fuller said his crews also fully understand that the work they are doing is vital to combat air operations here. “This is a huge undertaking,” he said. “The section we are replacing is the most critical because it’s where most of the aircraft landing at this base touch down.”

Cruising down the runway in a SUV, Master Sgt. Stephen “Batman” Batherson, superintendent of the CE element, here describes the condition of the runway as he juggles a radio to maintain contact with the control tower and a steering wheel.

“There’s no doubt this is the worst runway in the AOR,” Batherson, normally assigned to Kadena’s 18th CES, said. He also acknowledged that the work his 19-man crew is tackling at this austere Army airfield 25 miles north of Kabul is just short of mammoth. “Obviously it’s tough because we are constantly working around airflow. At any other base they’d close the runway for this

type of work,” he said, “but here we can’t because the combat mission here doesn’t take a break and the project needs to be done within 180 days.”

“This is a RED HORSE size project,” Batherson says matter of factly.

Fuller said that in the eight months a RED HORSE unit was here they replaced 500 concrete slabs in about six months, current plans call for coalition crews here to replace 2,750 slabs in the same amount of time.

Coalition work on the airfield here includes more than just work on the active runway according to Fuller. Work is also being done on several helicopter-parking areas and a taxiway expansion is also in the works. The additional labor on the airfield project is not only coming from the Army Corps of Engineers but also from military civil engineers from Slovakia, Thailand and Korea.

“Working with coalition partners has created some communications challenges,” Fuller acknowledged. “But our NCOs have bridged the barriers there and are working cohesively to get the mission done,” he said.

Trying to get their work on the runway done, Foster’s crew stops again.

As trucks, and crews with equipment scurry to the runway’s paved edge, Foster looks to the sky and says: “Gotta stop. Here comes another plane.”

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forces known to seek shelter there. But he also praised the country for arresting about 470 al-Qaida and Taliban suspects and giving the U.S. military transit, flyover and basing rights.

The allies have launched a dozen large-scale conventional operations, with forces numbering up to 500, since August. Previously, it concentrated on sending out small units, such as Special Forces platoons, to seek out and confront the enemy, he said.

McNeill said he made the change because he and his staff calculated that one of the mistakes committed by Soviet forces during their disastrous 10-year occupation of Afghanistan, which ended in 1989, was that they "hunkered down in bases next to airfields too much and did not stay on the move."

The change in tactics "produced fruit immediately" in limiting the enemy's ability to find sanctuary, the general said.

McNeill, 56, has been in charge of allied forces, whose headquarters are in Bagram, since May 2002. He expects to be ordered to resume his previous command of the 18th Airborne Corps at Ft. Bragg, N.C., in coming weeks. The North Carolina native is also a former commander of the 82nd Airborne Division.

The general said he is optimistic that a United Nations-backed and Japanese-financed plan to disarm thousands of Afghan militiamen will be successful — as long as an ongoing effort to reform and reconstitute the leadership of the Afghan Ministry of Defense is successful.

The ministry is now dominated by Tajik commanders from the Northern Alliance coalition of militias, which combined with the U.S. military to drive the Taliban from power. But other ethnic groups, including the Pushtuns, must have greater representation before they give up their arms, he said.

For disarmament to be successful, the country must also see a "bolder step" in the pace of large-scale reconstruction projects and the jobs they create, so that demobilized militiamen have alternatives to being on the payrolls of warlords, McNeill said.

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Bagram Air Base MWR presents

1530Z at the MWR building: "The Object of Beauty." This story is about a ne'er do well and his girlfriend search for a thief.

Tomorrow's movie will be "The Matchmaker."



Local weather

TWO-DAY REGIONAL WEATHER FORECAST:

	Today	Wednesday
Bagram:	Mostly clear H: 75F L: 41F	Mostly clear H: 81F L: 48F
Kandahar:	Clear H: 84F L: 55F	Haze H: 88F L: 54F
Kabul:	Partly cloudy H: 75F L: 41F	Partly cloudy H: 81F L: 46F
Uzbekistan:	Partly cloudy H: 78F L: 44F	Partly cloudy H: 82F L: 43F

Weather forecast courtesy of the Bagram Combat Weather Team

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Coalition Sports Zone

(Compiled from *ESPN.com*)

Hewitt to replace Agassi in top spot

ROME — Andre Agassi's hold on No. 1 slipped away about as quickly as his lead against a 60th-ranked opponent at the Italian Open.

In his first match since becoming the oldest man to lead the rankings, Agassi lost to David Ferrer of Spain 0-6, 7-6 (3), 6-4 on Monday.

Agassi was the defending champion at the Tennis Masters Series event, so the first-round defeat will drop him below Lleyton Hewitt in the 52-week rankings.

"To get to No. 1 at my age was already an accomplishment, and it's a long year so we'll be going back and forth," the 33-year-old American said. "But the most disappointing thing is to come to Rome and lose in the first round. There's nothing good about that."

He cruised through the first set in 24 minutes. But Ferrer — who had lost six first-round matches in a row — started holding serve in the second set, and Agassi's command began to slip away.

In the final set, Ferrer forced Agassi to hit into the net on break point to go up 5-4. Agassi's four unforced errors allowed Ferrer to serve out the match.

"He didn't play his best," Ferrer said. "I think I played the match of my life. In the first set I was very nervous. But then I just told myself: 'Stay calm, relax, enjoy.'"

Two other seeded players lost to Spaniards at the clay-court tournament. U.S. Open semifinalist Sjeng Schalken, seeded 10th, was beaten by Alberto Martin 2-6, 6-3, 6-1, while Wimbledon finalist David Nalbandian, seeded 11th, was eliminated by Felix Mantilla 6-3, 1-6, 6-0.

Sixth-seeded Marat Safin pulled out with a sore wrist.

Agassi came in with a 23-1 match record and four titles this year, including the Australian Open for his eighth career Grand Slam tournament championship.

"In the first set I was taking my chances, everything was going well," he said. "In the second set I also had my chances, but he started playing better, and I took my foot of the gas pedal."

A week ago, Agassi rallied to beat Andy Roddick in the final of the U.S. Men's Clay Court Championships, giving him enough points to surpass Hewitt. Agassi hadn't been No. 1 since Sept. 10, 2000, when he was replaced by Pete Sampras.

Hewitt and Sampras both withdrew from the Italian Open.

Hewitt indicated he wants more time to rest before preparing for the French Open, which starts May 26. Sampras hasn't played since beating Agassi in the U.S. Open final in September.

In other action Monday, the fifth-seeded Roddick beat Andrea



Andre Agassi is still an impressive 23-2 this year, winning four titles.

Gaudenzi 6-2, 6-3, 15th-seeded Guillermo Coria beat Tim Henman 6-2, 6-1, seventh-seeded Albert Costa defeated Zeljko Krajan 6-4, 7-5, Ivan Ljubicic topped Xavier Malisse 6-2, 6-4, and Mardy Fish eliminated Fabrice Santoro 7-5, 7-5.

'Wonderful' Cup brings best out of Serena

LOWELL, Mass. — The Williams sisters were a nation unto themselves.

They won all five matches they played against the Czech Republic without dropping a set, sending the United States into the quarterfinals of the Fed Cup.

"My serve was cooking a little more," top-ranked Serena Williams said after the clinching victory. "It's a wonderful experience. I really love it. Go USA."

The United States took a 2-0 lead into Sunday, and Williams needed just 50 minutes to beat Klara Koukalova 6-2, 6-2 and put the Americans into the next round in July, when they will face Italy.

She gave the United States an unbeatable lead in the best-of-five competition. Venus Williams defeated Iveta Benesova 6-3, 6-2 in the last singles match, with doubles to follow.

The sisters completed the 5-0 weekend sweep with a 6-0, 6-1 doubles victory in 44 minutes, beating Daja Bedanova and Eva Birnerova.

They then joined teammates Meghann Shaughnessy and Alexandra Stevenson in parading the American flag around the Tsongas Arena court after the clinching match.

U.S. captain Billie Jean King opted not to substitute the sisters for the doubles match.

"When your No. 1 and 2 players want to play, they play. They've earned it," King said, adding that Shaughnessy and Stevenson understood. "I told them and they said, 'Fair enough, we have to earn it.'"

Serena Williams said the doubles match was "a good opportunity for not only myself and Venus to get a wonderful practice, but as well for the fans."

The Williams sisters said they hope to play against Italy, but offered no promises.

The Czechs, a match away from elimination, made a last-minute lineup change Sunday against Serena Williams. Koukalova took the court instead of Bedanova, who lost to Venus in 48 minutes Saturday.

"Actually, Venus said she expected that," Serena Williams said. "It doesn't matter."

A day earlier, Serena Williams attributed her slow start to another surprise — she hadn't realized Benesova was left-handed.

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She won 7-5, 6-1.

The outcome was in stark contrast to last year. King kicked Jennifer Capriati off the team last year for practice violations. That resulted in the team forfeiting the first match against Austria, which won 3-2 in Charlotte, N.C.

"I think the biggest difference definitely is you see that teamwork and chemistry works," U.S. assistant coach Zina Garrison said. "The enthusiasm has been great."

Serena Williams recorded nine aces against Koukalova and was successful on 10 of 13 net approaches.

"I still feel a little rusty on the edges," she said. "My commitment to go to the net was what I've been looking for in the past year or so, but I would still like to make more of a commitment."

King calls Serena "the complete package ... but can you imagine if she starts going to the net more often, too? It can only get better."

Flesch drains 30-footer in playoff for first PGA Tour win

NEW ORLEANS — Steve Flesch walked up to the green on the first playoff hole, and even though his ball was 35 feet from hole, there wasn't a doubt in his mind.

"I remember reading the putt, but I don't even remember what I read," he said. "I just knew I was going to make it."

Flesch won for the first time in his career Sunday, capping an impressive comeback with that 35-foot birdie putt on the first extra hole at the HP Classic of New Orleans.

Flesch, who began the day seven shots behind leader Scott Verplank, shot a final-round 65 to finish tied with Bob Estes at 21-under 267.

"We've been looking forward to this for a long time," said the six-year veteran, who couldn't contain a smile as he answered reporter's questions with his fidgety 4-year-old son, Griffin, sitting in his lap.

"Even though I was seven back, I came out of that hotel this morning, that wind was blowing 15-20 mph, I knew I had a chance," he said. "My biggest battle is always just hanging in there long enough. I'm always trying my butt off, but sometimes I just think that there is no way I can win. Today, for some reason, I just knew from the first hole."

Verplank held a two-stroke lead with four holes to play, but bogeyed 16 and double-bogeyed 18 to finish a 2-over 74. He was third at 19-under.

"I just played bad. I don't know what else to say," he said. "I had plenty of opportunities to get a little distance and I didn't make the putts."

Flesch joined Mike Weir as the only left-handers to win on tour this year. Weir has won three times, including The Masters last month.

Both Estes and Flesch hit solid tee shots to start the playoff hole, the challenging 471-yard, par-4 18th, which yielded only two birdies in the final round. They reached the green comfortably in two.

Flesch's ball was just a few feet from Estes' and about five feet farther from the hole.

The winning putt rolled steady, straight and fast, and when it dropped Flesch leaped into the air and pumped his fist over his head, taking a victory lap around the green.

"Fifteen feet from the hole, it got over that ridge ... I knew it was in," he said.

Park sinks 20-footer on 18

WILLIAMSBURG, Va. — Grace Park's first shot Sunday was a drive into the water that led to a double-bogey. Her last one of the round was a beauty, a double-breaking par putt of nearly 20 feet that gave her a one-stroke victory in the inaugural Michelob Light Open.

Park began the day with a one-stroke lead over Cristie Kerr, but immediately gave it away with the double-bogey on No. 1, a bogey on 2 and a bogey on No. 4 that included a shank into the gallery.

But she rallied for consecutive birdies on holes 5-7, and her par save on 18 left her one stroke in front of three players and gave her a fourth tour victory.

After her rotten start, "I literally said it to myself: 'Believe in yourself.' ... If it's meant to be, things will come your way," she said.

Park finished Sunday with an even-par 71 and was 9 under for the tournament, a stroke ahead of Kerr (71), Karrie Webb (67) and Lorena Ochoa (69).



Grace Park jumps into the arms of her caddy after draining the winning putt.

**"Yeah, sure, I have time for an interview.
What station are you with?"**



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By Kevin Kilgore

Laugh Support